



# Enduring Attributes of the Profession

## Trust, Discipline, Fitness

General Robert W. Cone, U.S. Army

**T**HE PAST TEN years of conflict have had an enormous impact on our military. Personnel, equipment, families, and the institution as a whole have all been stressed and hastily adapted to support units as they deploy, return, rearm, reequip, retrain, and deploy again. Now is the time to recommit to our profession, take a hard look at the trends of individual and unit behaviors, our policies, doctrine, training, and supporting programs to ensure we can meet the challenges we will face as part of our post-war transition and preparation for an uncertain future.

There are three critical and enduring attributes that underpin the profession and the professional. They are trust, discipline, and fitness. The Army as an institution earns its trust from the people, and as a profession, we must earn that trust daily. Discipline is embodied in our faithful adherence to the oath we have taken, as members of the profession to protect and defend our Nation and its values. Our fitness prepares us mentally and physically to meet the demands of our profession.

When you say it aloud, you think: “that’s a no brainer.” Yet as I review the initial results of the Profession of Arms Interim Report, I am not so sure. The Army has a cohort of young soldiers and future leaders who define those three traits through the prism of their experiences in combat operations, when they return from a deployment, and even when they are away from their duty. Interestingly, their definition changes and their application of those traits change or are inconsistent. So let me discuss those enduring attributes, discuss why they are important, why we need to ensure we maintain these attributes with the highest of standards, and talk to their impact on the Army’s move to the future.

### Trust

*Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great.* —Ralph Waldo Emerson

Trust can be considered the lifeblood of our profession. Our Nation puts its trust in the military, relying on our ethic, integrity, and professionalism.

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Art: *The Oath of the Horatii*, Jacques-Louis David, oil on canvas, 1784, Louvre, Paris.

*The subject of the painting is the oath taken by three brothers to defend Rome in battle, knowing that they have to sacrifice their lives. The painting depicts the brothers swearing upon their swords as they take their oath.*

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(DOD, Sandra Arnold)

**A U.S. soldier holds hands with an Afghan boy at the Nawabad School in Deh Dadi district, Afghanistan, 30 September 2010.**

The people entrust to its leaders the lives of their children to soldier in our ranks. They trust that the Army will not waste those precious resources. The people also put their trust in the profession to apply the lethal force the Army is empowered to use within the ethical boundaries of international law and our national values. This *sacred trust* defines the bond between our Nation and its soldiers. As a profession, it is our responsibility to ensure that bond is continuously nurtured, strengthened, and matured.

As soldiers, we entrust ourselves to others, a trust that can easily be broken if it were ever betrayed. When I looked at my junior leaders, I trusted that they would do what was right to accomplish the operational mission. Trust was vital between soldier and leader; it ensured the bond among professional soldiers and units and enabled them to accomplish their mission. Yet when we returned from that operational environment, I sensed junior leaders did not always perceive their senior leaders would tell it like it really was and that micromanagement was a display of a lack of trust.

Trust is a tenuous line with the expectation that our leaders, our peers, and our subordinates will adhere to basic standards of truth and integrity. It can be built or destroyed based on how an individual behaves, how they communicate (with their subordinates, peers, and leaders), and how they demonstrate their military skills.

A leader's number one virtue is trust. Without it, soldiers will not follow his lead. Trust requires evidence from the leaders. Evidence that leaders will act fairly, will help others to achieve their goals, and will act on moral and ethical principles. Leaders who display questionable characteristics, such as double standards, evidence of unfaithfulness, or even disregard for law, can create an environment of mistrust.

There can be no equivocation of trust; it either exists or it does not. As an institution, we can work with individuals to correct faults that weaken trust. If our trust is lost with the American people, the repercussions on the institution will take years to overcome. If our trust as leaders is lost with our subordinates, we cannot effectively lead and will ultimately fail in our mission.



## Discipline

*Nothing is more harmful to the service than the neglect of discipline; for that discipline, more than numbers, gives one army superiority over another.*

—George Washington

I remember, in the late '70s and early '80s, the all-volunteer Army began to reestablish standards in training and performance for individuals and units based on specific metrics. Performance-based training required soldiers and units to meet a set of clearly articulated standards, and failure to maintain those standards was cause for enforcing discipline. We expedited the process for eliminating substandard soldiers and officers who failed to maintain the established standards of discipline. We learned from our mistakes as an institution, and soon the Army's relationship with the American people improved as did the Army's expertise, leadership, training, tactical and operational skills, and most importantly, its professionalism. Then we proved ourselves to the American public, starting with Urgent Fury in Grenada, followed later in the decade with Just Cause in Panama, and then Desert Shield and Desert Storm

where we demonstrated that the Nation could trust the Army to effectively and efficiently accomplish the mission. These successes were the result of years of hard work to reemphasize training and doctrine and years of individuals seeking to professionally improve themselves and the profession. Many of the leaders and soldiers that helped to reestablish the Army's discipline never fought in combat. However, their discipline and dedication to the profession rebuilt the Army to adapt to the transition from the Cold War to the War on Terror.

We as individual soldiers and leaders must embody the values we have taken an oath to defend. The character of the individual, their values, ideals, and beliefs dictate that members of the profession must be disciplined to meet the demands of the profession at all times. Military discipline is the responsibility of the profession and its leaders, including equitable punishment, and orderly conduct. Punishment, though a last resort, is designed to control and enforce obedience. Without the control and demand for correct performance of duty, there would be no order.



(U.S. Army)

The concepts of trust, discipline, and fitness are often difficult to convey to a society in which only one percent have served in uniform. Here, *Comedy Central* political pundit Steven Colbert undergoes mock basic training in his effort to understand the Profession of Arms, Fort Jackson, SC, 8 May 2009.



(U.S. Army)

**SGT Derek Williams (left), B Company 229th Military Intelligence Battalion, leads squad members on a sprint around the Price Fitness Center running track, Monterey, CA, 17 August 2011.**

However, today, discipline is at risk as a basic Army competency. The gains made from our combat experiences are being lost because of leader failures to enforce standards while in garrison, their tolerance of substandard soldiers, poor subordinate leaders, and nonaccountability are beginning to erode the high standards of discipline and self-discipline that the Army must maintain. It appears that many young leaders have varied expectations between deployed and garrison operations, the vital balance between Army life and family life has become uncertain. Even the development of junior leaders outside the combat environment has become overwhelming.

Self-discipline is as important as discipline. Taking the initiative to take action, possessing the character and integrity to do what is right, even when no one is watching, is paramount. The Army provides its future leaders the values and ethics of the institution. Then, as part of basic officer and noncommissioned officer training, soldiers are taught technical and tactical skills, they learn their

core leadership attributes, and then enhance their ability to apply the fundamentals of leadership in small unit environments. Learning, like discipline, is a lifelong endeavor; soldiers must understand the responsibilities for self-development (physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, technical, and tactical) outside of the institution and the organization. They need to have the self-discipline to improve themselves.

Information is a click away; leaders should be even closer to assist and mentor the future of our Army, guiding soldiers as they strive to expand their capabilities.

## **Fitness**

*[Fitness] is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.* —John F. Kennedy

Being physically and mentally prepared is an individual and unit sacrifice of time and effort, a commitment that allows the Army to be prepared and ready when needed. No matter where we are,

at home or deployed, we must maintain our physical condition. Physical fitness is an attribute required for service in the Army, and soldiers and leaders have to be focused on rigorous physical fitness training. It is a basic foundation to a competent professional that allows soldiers to function efficiently and effectively and fulfill the mission and tasks assigned.

Combat affects every service member, both physically and mentally. The survey employed as part of the Profession of Arms review noted that professional competence in the area of physical fitness received lower ratings and indicated that many leaders and subordinates appeared to be failing to meet standards or doing little to try to exceed them. The survey also noted that these initial results on fitness need further review because of the potential impact of multiple deployments. Regardless, the signals indicate that, should our fitness decline, then so shall our professional competence. In war there can be significant mental fitness challenges for the service men and women protecting our country. The demands and stresses soldiers are facing today in Iraq and Afghanistan are affecting their mental fitness. Unfortunately, there is an increasing number of Army personnel who return from deployment with conditions such as post-traumatic stress and substance abuse disorders.

Resiliency training, or being able to bounce back from adversity, focuses on the physical, spiritual, familial, emotional, and social needs of the soldier. Becoming mentally strong is just as important, if not more important, than physical strength to overcome obstacles and setbacks and to maintain positive thoughts during times of adversity and challenge. For the individual soldier, turning to family, friends, a chaplain, counselor, or talking about issues with

associates is the best way to confront, understand, and cope with those issues. Leaders must attune themselves to their soldiers to identify problems, provide an environment of trust and support for their soldiers, and lead them to find the help they need to face their fears. The outcome will only enhance the Army's readiness.

Clearly, we do not want to revisit the post-war conditions of the "hollow Army" we experienced at the end of Vietnam. The Army reshaped itself, focused on new doctrine, on the implementation of a new operational strategy, and on training techniques to accomplish that strategy; it then proved itself as a viable institution to the American people. However, in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, we as a profession began to lose the art of leadership. We began to manage our profession through statistics rather than by leading our soldiers.

This war has made us better by giving us opportunities. We have great combat leaders. The Profession of Arms campaign is going to allow each of us the opportunity to identify the competencies of the profession. It will help us understand how to make our young sergeants and our young lieutenants understand what it truly means to be in the profession, to sustain the art of leadership, and to be a professional, while avoiding the pitfalls we have experienced in the past.

We can expect resources for the future to be more focused. Therefore, we want to ensure that our resource strategy (for both human and fiscal resources) is capable of procuring a viable force able to respond to a wide range of mission sets. We want to ensure the enduring traits of the profession remain intact and serve as that foundation to help us in our transition and in our preparation for the future. **MR**